




STATE OF MARYLAND

DHMH

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

Larry Hogan, Governor - Boyd Rutherford, Lt. Governor - Van Mitchell, Secretary

To: Individuals
Family Members
DDA Providers
DDA Coordinators of Community Services
DDA Regional Directors

From: Bernie Simons, Deputy Secretary 

Subject: The Supports Intensity Scale® Launch and Implementation

Date: February 29, 2016

The Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) will be launching the Supports Intensity Scale® (SIS®) during 2016. Our goal is to start implementation in several phases effective March 2016. This letter and attached questions and answers provide an overview of the SIS® and what to expect in the coming months.

What is the SIS®?

The SIS® is an assessment of an individual's needs to support independence. It was created by the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD). It focuses on the individual's current level of support needs instead of focusing on skills or abilities they may not currently demonstrate; and it's used as a planning guide in the development of the individuals person centered plan.

The SIS® has many benefits including:

1. Enhancing person-centered planning;
2. Identifying person specific support and staffing needs; and
3. Identifying employment related supports.

How will the DDA's SIS® be implemented in MD?

The DDA has contracted with Support Network Inc. to administer the SIS®. Support Network Inc., has staff trained by the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) to administer the SIS®.

When is the DDA's SIS[®] implementation plan?

The DDA plans to implement the SIS[®] beginning the month of March in the following phases:

Phase one- The SIS[®] will be completed for all individuals for whom a Level of Need Assessment/Matrix Level has been requested since July 1, 2015 including:

- Individuals new to the DDA,
- Transitioning Youth, and
- Individuals who have experienced significant changes.

Phase two- The SIS[®] will be completed for all individuals in Residential Services.

Phase three- The SIS[®] will be completed for individuals in Day or Employment Services.

The DDA firmly believes that Marylanders with Developmental Disabilities will be best served by implementing the SIS[®] and looks forward to the anticipated benefits identified on behalf of individuals receiving services.

Attached to this letter are Q&A that we hope will provide additional information about the SIS[®] and assist agencies as they prepare to support the individuals they support. Additional updates on implementation will be shared in our newsletter. For more information on the SIS[®], please visit www.aaidd.org or contact Terah Tessier at terah.tessier@maryland.gov.

The Supports Intensity Scale® (SIS®) Q&A (updated 3/1/16)

1. **What is the SIS®?** The SIS® is a tool designed to measure the relative intensity of support that each person with developmental disabilities (e.g., cognitive/intellectual disabilities, autism, and cerebral palsy) needs to fully participate in community life. The SIS® is intended to be used in conjunction with person-centered planning processes to assist planning teams in developing individualized support plans that are responsive to the needs and choices of persons with disabilities. The SIS® is a standardized tool that is used statewide for determining Support Levels for individuals in the Home and Community Based Medicaid Waiver program.

SIS® measures the individual's support needs in personal, work-related, and social activities in order to identify and describe the types and intensity of the supports an individual requires. SIS® was designed to be part of person-centered planning processes that help all individuals identify their unique preferences, skills, and life goals.

The supports approach also recognizes that individual needs change over time, and that supports must change as well. They must be developed and delivered in age-appropriate settings, with the understanding that, regardless of intellectual abilities or limitations, people should have the opportunity engage in activities and life experiences just like any other person.

2. **Who wrote the SIS®?** The SIS® was developed over a five-year period by a team of experts from the American Association on Mental Retardation (now the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities -AAIDD). Since 1876, the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities has been providing leadership in the field of developmental disabilities.
3. **Why will the SIS® be used in Maryland?** The SIS® was selected by a Workgroup that included MACS, MACS provider members, representatives from the DDA, and Self Advocates several years ago. After evaluating a variety of assessment tools, the State chose the SIS® to gather consistent information about people's support needs. Information from the SIS®, along with other factors will be used to determine support levels as part of person centered planning processes. By October of 2014 a decision had been made to implement the SIS and it has been included in the DDA's Balancing Incentives Program (BIP) proposal.
4. **Why was the SIS chosen?** The SIS® chosen is that it was designed specifically for individuals with developmental disabilities. The SIS® was recommended by the Workgroup/Taskforce that included MACS members and Self Advocates.

The SIS[®] was selected by the State for numerous reasons:

- The SIS[®] is principally designed to directly feed into and support the development of person centered plans by measuring the frequency, intensity, and volume of support that individuals need in various dimensions of everyday functioning and living.
- The SIS[®] includes a focus on employment related supports.
- The SIS[®] provides an evaluation of significant medical and behavioral conditions.
- The SIS[®] focuses on an individual's current needs. Although historical usage is important information, the SIS[®] identifies needs for supports that may not have been used in the past.
- The SIS[®] yields reliable and valid information about individual support needs and, thereby, is a foundation for linking funding for such needs.
- Agencies can use the results to help plan for staffing, staff training, budgeting, strategic planning, and evaluation. Furthermore, the State can use the results for systems planning, and program evaluation.

5. **Who is administering the SIS[®] and how were they trained?** Consultants from AAIDD have trained assessors working for Support Network. Everyone who serves as a SIS[®] interviewer must be trained and then pass a reliability test before they are allowed to conduct interviews on their own.
6. **Who should be at the SIS[®] interview?** The individual receiving services should be present and can act as their own respondent or self-reporter. The certified SIS[®] interviewer will make sure that two or more appropriate respondents are included in the SIS[®] interview. An appropriate respondent is someone who knows the individual well and has had recent and frequent contact with them. According to AAIDD, a respondent must have known the person for at least three months (a full year is recommended) and have had recent opportunities to observe the person in one or more environments for substantial periods of time (at least several hours per setting). Two or three people who know the individual well and who the individual wants to participate should be present. It is not appropriate to have a large number of people present during a SIS[®] interview. The individual, the interviewer and a few respondents are essential.
7. **How long does a SIS[®] interview take?** The average amount of time for an interview is about 2 hours. There is a very specific way that the questions are to be asked. In addition, in order to maintain the validity of the assessment, interviewers have to ask all the questions on the assessment, even if the answer appears to be obvious. It is perfectly okay to ask for a break if an individual or their family member needs one.

8. **Does everyone have to have a SIS[®] Assessment?** Everyone receiving or authorized to receive DDA services must have this assessment because information from the SIS will be used (in addition to other factors) in establishing staffing support as part of a person centered planning process.
9. **Can I get a copy of my SIS[®] Interview Form?** Yes, let the interviewer or your Coordinator of Community Services (CCS) know if you want a copy. The interviewer or your CCS can send you one after the results are scored and graphed.
10. **When an individual uses assistive technology, is the SIS[®] administered with the assistive technology in place?** Yes. This applies only to assistive technology that the person already has. For example, if a person has an assistive device (communication device, wheelchair, hearing aid and so on) they would be scored with the device in place.
11. **Is the intent of implementing the SIS to reduce funding for all individuals?** No, the State is not reducing the amount of funds. The intent of the SIS[®] is to have a reliable method to identify the proper support needs and other pertinent factors as part of a person centered planning process in order to help ensure that individuals receive the supports that they need.
12. **What if I have a concern or complaint about the SIS[®] Interview process?** The CCS shall provide a copy of the SIS[®] complaint process to the individual, guardian, authorized representative, and family member, as appropriate, at the time of the SIS[®] assessment.
13. **Where can I get more information about the SIS[®] and its use in Maryland?** For more information on the SIS[®], please visit www.aaid.org. Or contact Terah Tessier at terah.tessier@maryland.gov.